

SHORT COMMUNICATIONS

The attraction of Palaearctic migrants to lights at Kiambere, Kenya

Large numbers of night migrants are regularly attracted to lights situated on a ridge at Ngulia Lodge, south-eastern Kenya, during misty nights in November and December, and the southward passerine migration has been extensively studied there (Pearson & Backhurst 1976a, Backhurst & Pearson 1977, 1984). A similar phenomenon was also demonstrated in November in the nearby Chyulu Hills (Nikolaus 1980). Since mist is unusual at Ngulia during April, large falls have only occasionally been seen there then (Britton & Britton 1977, Pearson 1980), and spring Palaearctic passage in Kenya has been studied mainly near Nairobi at sites where local insect abundances have been an important attracting factor (see, for example, Pearson & Backhurst 1976b). Spring falls are occasionally reported after heavy rain from other isolated lighted sites such as Samburu Lodge (T. Stevenson, pers. comm.) and Mtito Andei, Pearson (1981). Further south, night falls at an elevated lighted site at Mufindi, southern Tanzania, during the wet, misty late April–early May period have involved mainly crakes Rallidae, Harlequin Quails *Coturnix delegourguei* and African Pittas *Pitta angolensis* (Beakbane & Boswell 1986). This note reports observations of Palaearctic migrants grounded, especially during April and May, below floodlight towers at a dam construction site on the upper Tana River.

The construction of the latest hydroelectric scheme on the Tana River at Kiambere (0° 42'S, 37° 47'E), with its 'around the clock' working has allowed observations on migration to be made when wet overnight conditions have produced falls around lighted areas. While attractions were noted at several of the work sites in the project area, and even at some of the well-illuminated existing power stations nearby, the observations recorded here in detail were made at the main Kiambere dam site. This site was located in a deep gorge on the Tana, and the earth-filled dam was constructed during 1986–87. Illumination for the works was provided by two floodlight towers on either bank of the gorge. The axis of the dam was approximately NW–SE and the installed towers each held fifteen 1 kW floodlights, all directed down into the gorge to illuminate the extensive dam foundations. The area immediately adjacent to each tower base was located outside the construction area on the steep rocky hillside and contained a few bushes which provided some cover in what was generally a cleared area. This resulted in some concentration of attracted birds and allowed an assessment of the species and numbers involved. The area at the base of one of the towers, which involved 30–40 per cent of the available cover, was surveyed each day. Each survey was carried out during a 30-min to 1-h period 'before work'. Time was inevitably spent in searching for 'new' species and in identifying difficult species rather than securing the most comprehensive coverage of the total attraction.

Most falls were noted during the northward passage period. Numbers counted during April–May 1986 and during more sporadic coverage in April–May 1987 are summarized in Table 1. Falls were larger during small-moon than large-moon periods, especially after rain. The main species involved was the Whitethroat *Sylvia communis*, with Red-backed Shrikes *Lanius collu-*

rio, Lesser Grey Shrikes *L. minor*, Sedge Warblers *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*, Great Reed Warblers *A. arundinaceus*, Upcher's Warblers *Hippolais languida* and Olivaceous Warblers *H. pallida*, featuring regularly. Iranias *Irania gutturalis*, Sprossers *Luscinia luscinia*, Rufous Bush Chats *Cercotrichas galactotes*, Rock Thrushes *Monticola saxatilis* and Red-tailed Shrikes *Lanius isabellinus* were confined practically to the early-mid April period. Comparing the April-May species at Kiambere with those prominent on northward passage at Nairobi (Pearson & Backhurst 1976b) it is interesting to note the absence of Garden Warblers *Sylvia borin* and the low numbers of Willow Warblers *Phylloscopus trochilus*.

Some very late migrant observations were made. Thus, in 1986, Red-tailed Shrike and Upcher's Warbler were seen at the beginning of May, with Olivaceous Warbler and Sedge Warbler present to 14th and five Whitethroats on 15th. In 1987, a Basra Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus griseldis* on 23 April, and a Rock Thrush, a Northern Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe* and a Barred Warbler *Sylvia nisoria* on 2 May were especially noteworthy.

Falls seemed to occur less often in autumn, the main occasions being on 5 November and after moonless, heavily overcast nights on 29-30 November 1986. Counts made on these dates are given in Table 2. The species composition was rather different from that in April. Thus many Northern Wheatears were present on 5 November, and many Marsh Warblers *Acrocephalus palustris* and a few Sprossers, Nightingales *Luscinia megarhynchos* and Iranias on 29-30th. There were no Sedge Warblers and only two shrikes; one of the latter was a Lesser Grey, a species rare in Kenya in autumn. The River Warbler *Locustella fluviatilis*, a species prominent in November movements at Ngulia (Pearson & Backhurst 1976a) was not encountered.

Table 2. Falls of Palaearctic migrants at Kiambere in November 1986. Numbers counted below one floodlight tower at dawn

Species	Date:	November	5	29	30
<i>Cercotrichas galactotes</i>				3	2
<i>Irania gutturalis</i>				2	
<i>Luscinia luscinia</i>				4	5
<i>L. megarhynchos</i>				1	4
<i>Monticola saxatilis</i>			3		
<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>			50	40	20
<i>O. pleschanka</i>			1		1
<i>Acrocephalus arundinaceus</i>				2	
<i>A. griseldis</i>				2	
<i>A. palustris</i>				20	
<i>Hippolais languida/pallida</i>				30	20
<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>				1	
<i>Sylvia communis</i>				40	30
<i>S. nisoria</i>				4	2
<i>Muscicapa striata</i>			1		
<i>Lanius collurio</i>				1	
<i>L. minor</i>				1	

References

- BACKHURST, G.C. & PEARSON, D.J. 1977. Southward migration at Ngulia, Tsavo, Kenya, 1976–77. *Scopus* 1: 12–16.
- BACKHURST, G.C. & PEARSON, D.J. 1984. The timing of southward night migration of Palaearctic birds over Ngulia, southeast Kenya. *Proceedings of the Fifth Pan-African Ornithological Congress*: 361–369.
- BEAKBANE, A.K. & BOSWALL, E.M. 1986. Nocturnal Afrotropical migrants at Mufindi, southern Tanzania. *Scopus* 8: 124–127.
- BRITTON, P.L. & BRITTON, H.A. 1977. An April fall of Palaearctic migrants at Ngulia. *Scopus* 1: 109–110.
- PEARSON, D.J. 1980. Northward spring passage of Palaearctic passerines across Tsavo. *Scopus* 4: 25–28.
- PEARSON, D.J. 1981. Spring falls of Palaearctic passerines at Mtito Andei, Kenya. *Scopus* 5: 80.
- PEARSON, D.J. & BACKHURST, G.C. 1976a. The southward migration of Palaearctic birds over Ngulia, Kenya. *Ibis* 118: 78–105.
- PEARSON, D.J. & BACKHURST, G.C. 1976b. Palaearctic passerine migration at Kariobangi, Nairobi. *EANHS Bulletin* 1976: 23–28.
- NIKOLAUS, G. 1980. An experiment to attract migrating birds with car headlights in the Chyulu Hills, Kenya. *Scopus* 4: 45–46.

*Bernard Boothroyd, 2 Bryn Teg, Llanfairfechan, Gwynedd LL33 0UB,
North Wales*

Scopus 11: 38–41, September 1987

Received 20 July 1987

Some summer records from north-west Somalia

In 1986 I spent five weeks (21 July to 24 August) in northern Somalia based in Hargeisa. Thirteen field trips were made into the surrounding countryside, of which some were repeat visits, but all, with the exception of one trip to Berbera on the coast, were within 65 km of Hargeisa.

The landscape in the Hargeisa area is undulating to hilly arid bush, and the river and stream beds were dry in August. Denser shrubs and trees occur along the river and stream courses. The recent increase in bunding to prevent rapid run-off and to aid soil infiltration has resulted in an increase in the growth of maize as fodder for livestock. Accompanying the bunding programme is the provision of water points for livestock and humans. This increase in available water is providing new habitats for wetland species such as the Sacred Ibis *Threskiornis aethiopica*, Redhank *Tringa totanus*, Greenshank *T. nebularia* and Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta*. Unfortunately some of these water points dry out towards the end of the dry season.

Ash & Miskell (1983)—hereafter referred to as A&M, Williams & Arlott (1980) and Mackworth-Praed & Grant (1980) were used for identification, but Volume 2 of the last work did not arrive in time to aid identification of many of the smaller passerines.

A total of 118 species was identified, the majority of which have already been